

There are some who, on seeing the title of this little book, are likely, in accord with their habitual procedures, to dismiss this middle-aged parish priest, teacher and prior as just another of those awful young clerics that some-

one ought to stop. These, doubtless, will complacently return to their digging. Sensible men put their trust in the Resurrection.

HAMISH SWANSTON

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, by Peter Brown. *Faber and Faber, London, 1967.* 463 pp. 70s.

St Augustine provokes more violent and contradictory responses today than any other Father of the Church: he assaults our emotions so fiercely that it is hard to write about him without being infected by his passionate committedness. The total impact of his ideas and the way they are presented are so often either overwhelmingly attractive or utterly repulsive that it is remarkable that Mr Brown has been able to write a good biography of the saint which is unpolemical and yet tough. Two things give the book its distinctive flavour: Mr Brown is primarily a historian and his command of the sources both primary and secondary enables him not only to place Augustine illuminatingly within his historical and social context, but also to do justice to his role as an ecclesiastical politician. Secondly, Mr Brown takes as one of his principal themes St Augustine's feelings: his developing and astonishing knowledge of the *psyche*, his own moods and emotionalism and the effect these factors had upon his standpoint as a controversialist. The side of Augustine that Mr Brown emphasises is well illustrated by his citation from *Tract. in Joh.* 26, 4: 'Give me a man in love: he knows what I mean. Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the Spring of the Eternal country. Give me that sort of man: he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he just does not know what I am talking about.'

Emphasis on Augustine as theologian of the feelings is not new; but what is, I think, new is the way this biography develops the theme so as to yield a great many important insights. For instance, Augustine is repelled by Pelagius because of his facile psychology: the latter assumes that conversion is both easy and final and that a perfect life is primarily a matter of will-power. Augustine knows that for himself and for most people this is simply not true. Again, what distinguishes the *Confessions* from other ancient conversion narratives, pagan and Christian alike, is not only the concentration on feelings and emotions, but the author's realization in Book X that he is still a spiritual

convalescent, not the cured, the totally changed personality of the conventional ancient stereotype.

Mr Brown's approach has two signal advantages. First of all, it provides a unifying theme which makes his book satisfying at a purely literary level. Secondly, it gets him out of the impasse in which so much writing about Augustine in the past has been stuck. Some scholars (Gilson is a distinguished example), misled perhaps by Augustine's own *Retractions*, have treated him as the builder of an intellectual system, 'Augustinisme', which was completed in all essentials by the time he became Bishop of Hippo and which subsequently underwent no more than modification of emphasis under the pressure of controversy. Even Gerald Bonner's *St Augustine of Hippo*, published in 1963, an excellent book from which the biography under review has profited, is occasionally marred by this static view of its subject, as well as by a slight tendency to do less than justice to Augustine's critics, ancient and modern, and to discount his more disquieting attitudes and opinions. Others, reacting away from the traditional approach, have crudely divided up his life into segments, for instance making him out to be a neo-platonist with a mere veneer of Christianity until about 395, as Alfaro did, or with Allin drawing a sharp distinction between an earlier 'catholic' and a later 'anti-pelagian' illiberal period. Mr Brown's more sophisticated approach saves him from either of these extremes: his admirable fairness and honesty give us a man far removed from the passionless figure of popular hagiography, more formidable than the genial subject of van der Meer's *Augustine the Bishop* and equally removed from the crypto-Manichee of some contemporary intellectual demonology.

The most serious defect is the imbalance inevitable in view of the author's decision to concentrate on Augustine's attitude to feelings and emotions. To assert that 'the life of feeling was what really counted in personal growth' is the underlying theme of the *Confessions*, is eccentric, to say the least. Moreover, important

areas of Augustine's thinking like his Trinitarian speculations or his sophisticated theory of communication (cp. Dr Markus's important paper in *Phronesis* II and Wittgenstein's use of a passage from *Confessions* I as a starting-point for his *Philosophical Investigations*) receive inadequate notice; and some, like Augustine's theory of knowledge, are not mentioned at all. Yet his theory of knowledge dominated Western Europe until the rediscovery of Aristotle and through its influence on Ockham and Luther it has become a permanent part of our cultural and religious inheritance. Perhaps Mr Brown is not really interested in philosophy; he several times uses astounding expressions like Augustine's 'highly specialized training as a philosopher' (p. 277), as though the reading of a few books by Cicero, Plotinus and Porphyry and precious little else by philosophers (no Plato apart from the *Timaeus*, no Aristotle except the *Categories*) could be called a philosophical training. Surely Marrou

is nearer the mark in stressing his *lack* of philosophical training. Indeed, it was one of Augustine's gravest disadvantages: a rigorous discipline in logic might have eradicated the sheer silliness which so often coexists with startling profundity in his work. Close contact with friends or adversaries of equal intellectual stature might have achieved the same result, but only Julian of Eclanum had a sharpness of mind to match Augustine's own and by that time he was too old and rigid to benefit.

But all in all this is an excellent book, full of fresh insights and provocative observations, e.g. about the passivity of the good in the Manichean system, which may be erroneous but compel the reader to think. If it irritates the uncritical hagiologist and enlightens those whose only acquaintance with Augustine derives from standard polemics against his views on sex or the problem of evil, so much the better.

DUNCAN CLOUD

CATHOLIC ACTION IN ITALY. The Sociology of a Sponsored Organization, by Gianfranco Poggi. *Stanford University Press. London: Oxford University Press. 280 pp. 64s.*

There seems no end to the tensions, charges and counter-charges, followed by thinly-veiled dismissals, of national officials in Catholic Action movements. First Italy, where the two successors of Signor Gedda, Carlo Carretto and Mario Rossi, were both ousted from the National presidency of the G.I.A.C.; then France, where the president of the A.C.J.F., André Vial, resigned because of differences with the hierarchy and the A.C.J.F. has never been reconstituted, and where both the student movement and the rural movements have had their *ennuis* with the bishops. And now Spain and Latin America with wholesale sackings and resignations of national officials and chaplains. All this would seem to suggest that there is some built-in reason why relations between Catholic Action organizations and authorities in the Church, i.e. the bishops, are bound to go sour. This is Dr Poggi's thesis.

In this analytical work of organizational sociology he develops the thesis that *Azione Cattolica Italiana* has not been able to achieve its objectives precisely because it is a 'sponsored organization'. Most of his data is drawn from field research, in which he himself participated, carried out in 1957 and 1958 under the direction of Professor La Palombara of Michigan State University. In fact, apart from sketching in the historical background, the period

covered is from the last years of the war up to the end of Pius XII's pontificate in 1958.

The main argument is that the Church reacted against increasing secularization in two ways, first by concentrating the powers of decision making at the top, i.e. the Holy See, and secondly by an appeal to the laity to join large-scale organizations sponsored by the Church, to defend and further its mission in and to the world. Several different types of organization are distinguished and of them the author chooses Catholic Action because it is 'characterized by a stricter dependence on the hierarchy and by the more properly religious content of its activity'. Catholic Action is taken to be a structure promoted by the Church in an effort to establish and maintain a viable contact with an estranged world, and with this description one would not be inclined to quarrel. The analysis is concerned with the relationship between this instrumental organization and the institution that sponsors it, i.e. the Pope and bishops.

The case is well argued and would seem to be proven so far as the pre-conciliar Church was concerned, with its inadequate theology of the laity and permanent confusion about the distinction between spiritual and temporal. After all, it is only nine years ago that Pius XII (quoted by Dr Poggi) was saying that 'the